



# UNIVERSIDAD DE LA RIOJA

## TRABAJO FIN DE ESTUDIOS

Título

La Pérdida de la Cultura en Comunidades Nativas Americanas:  
Un Estudio del Trauma Intergeneracional y Problemas  
Derivados en la novela Filtro de Amor de Erdrich

Autor/es

ELIZABETH NAVARRO ECHEVERRÍA

Director/es

MARÍA JESÚS HERNÁNDEZ LERENA

Facultad

Facultad de Letras y de la Educación

Titulación

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

Departamento

FILOLOGÍAS MODERNAS

Curso académico

2018-19



***La Pérdida de la Cultura en Comunidades Nativo Americanas: Un Estudio del Trauma Intergeneracional y Problemas Derivados en la novela Filtro de Amor de Erdrich***, de ELIZABETH NAVARRO ECHEVERRÍA

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# TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

## Título

Culture Loss in Native American Communities: A Study of Intergenerational Trauma and derived community problems in Erdrich's *Love Medicine*

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## Autor

Elizabeth Navarro Echeverría

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## Tutor/es

María Jesús Hernández Lerena

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## Grado

Grado en Estudios Ingleses [601G]

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**Facultad de Letras y de la Educación**

Año académico

2017/18



UNIVERSIDAD  
DE LA RIOJA

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## Introduction

European colonization of the Americas, which started in 1492, was seen by the Christian world as a divine duty. In the case of North America, English settlers were driven by the controversial idea known as Manifest Destiny, an ideology that claimed that the land was a gift bestowed by God, and Christians, as his people, had a divine right to claim it. As a result, as Jones et al. (2011) state in their paper: “any measures required to accomplish this process were seen as necessary and just even if it meant taking the lives and land of American Indians” (2). Furthermore, the belief in the divine right did not only serve the purpose for justifying slaughter and the forced appropriation of land previously owned by Native Americans; in order to continue the expansion and claim the territory, a series of laws and relocations were approved that targeted the extinction not of a race, but of a culture and its identity, were approved. Instead of eradicating Native Americans, the government targeted what keeps communities together: family ties, tradition, religion and language.

Community problems which Native Americans experience today may be traced back in time to events regarding the approval of laws which resulted in land theft, mass killing, relocations, forced separation between parents and children, and the prohibition of Native American religion, customs and language. Problems such as alcohol abuse, drugs, suicide, insanity and domestic violence among others can be linked to the destruction of their identity as Native American people. In “Promoting wellness among Native American Youth: an exploration of historical trauma and healing in space and time” (2006) Linares contends that such problems are indeed caused by negative emotions caused by the rumination of the past and to the consequences that government policies have produced in Native American families through interviews with Native American elders. On the other hand, Sarche & Spicer’s paper, “Poverty and Health Disparities for American Indian and Alaskan Native Children: Current Knowledge and Future Prospects” (2008), provides an accurate investigation on psychological and physical wellness among Native American communities that sustains this view.

It should be clarified, however, that Native American culture was not and is not a homogenous one. Erdrich’s novel, *Love Medicine*, depicts a community which belongs to the Great Plains, the Anishinaabe. This essay centres not on all Native American people, but on the culture and lives of the northern tribes depicted by Erdrich.

Nevertheless, most problems which I shall address are common among other communities.

This essay aims to show the grief and misery that a particular ethnic group has had to suffer due to racism and greed. From land theft to forced assimilation to Christianity and other measures of domination, it shall aim to give a coherent historic answer to the issues of alcoholism, violence, drugs, poverty and high Native American young people suicide rates which plague many Indian reservations nowadays. To such end, Louise Erdrich's book shall be used. The author, being a member of the Turtle Band of Chippewa, part of the Pempina Band of the Chippewa tribe, grew within the limits of her reservation. Her work focus on the life and struggles of different Native American generations on a fictional reservation. Through *Love Medicine*, the causes and consequences of the clash of cultures which took place shall be analysed.

## **2. Methodology**

In order to analyse Native American community issues in Erdrich's work, I have used three perspectives; intergenerational trauma, racial trauma and narrative identity.

It is through the presence of intergenerational and racial trauma within a Native's identity that known Native American issues take place. As a result, I have decided to make use of Narrative Identity to explain it. Identity is a complex construction that has been studied profusely in psychology. There are many theories that explain its formation and its effects on behaviour. Narrative Identity is the most ideal theory in order to show how the construction of identity through flawed components, results in the expression of violent and self-destructive behaviour. Being no expert on the subject, the studies of McAdams & McLean (2013) and Bamberg (2011) shall be the foundation of my analysis to which I shall add other works that explore the effect of racial trauma on Native American sense of self, and which I shall be citing in the following pages.

In McAdams & McLean's paper (2008), they define narrative identity as an internalized and evolving life story which provides unity, purpose and meaning to the individual. In the past, the tradition of storytelling provided meaning and role models for Native Americans to construct their identities through their stories, but it was extirpated, and subsequent generations were left only with negative concepts and racist rejection. In addition, the expressed or seen emotional and physical suffering of close family and friends, and the accumulation of past injustices regarding the Native people, led to feelings of rage and hopelessness. In Erdrich's work, Native American youth is especially

sensitive to their Ancestor's suffering and the feelings of inferiority developed by their close ones, resulting in a weak identity which crumbles under the weight of coping with it all.

On the other hand, Racial Trauma and Intergenerational state that past narrations of suffering and experienced woe travel from parent to children until they create a never-ending cycle of dysfunctionality due to psychological pain (Brown-Rice, K., 2013, 11-13) Moreover, the lack of cultural roots that provide symbols and meaning for a healthier identity and better coping mechanisms (McAdams, D. & McLean, K., 2013, 237) worsens the situation. Generations accumulate the pain of ancestor after ancestor, which is summed and added to the daily experiences of rejection suffered by the children. As a result, with each generation the trauma becomes greater. Such theory is valid for any group that has experienced such events; African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, etc.

In addition, it is important to bear in mind that the Intergenerational trauma theory which will be used for this study comes from the term "historical trauma", which is used by scholars who have studied literature on the Jewish Holocaust survivors and their descendants in order to understand how trauma affects different generations and how these experiences could be related to the Native American situation (Brown-Rice, K., 2013, 1). Nowadays, scholars agree that the conquest and subjugation suffered by Native Americans can be considered in the same light as that of the Nazi Holocaust; Native American communities were stripped of rights and lands, dehumanized in instances like that of the Apaches, who were first slaughtered, survivors were brought to labour concentration camps, and, finally, forced to live on reservation land, which was the poorest and the one not wanted by white settlers. The effects are felt in subsequent generation transferred through biological, psychological, environmental and social means (Brown-Rice, K., 2013, 2). These means through which trauma is transferred are poverty, lack of education, psychological distress, and issues among family members that lead to alcohol abuse and dependence, violence, risk taking behaviour, self-harming behaviour, substance abuse, suicide (very common among the youth), and bad health. In addition, forced assimilation led to "feelings of shame, powerlessness and subordination" (Brown-Rice, K., 2013, 3) in subsequent generations. Much can be added to the impact of historical loss and trauma. In this paper, however, I shall centre on the issues which appear in Erdrich's fictional Native American community of *Love Medicine*, community which

is haunted by the accumulated stream of suffering that threatens to destroy their protagonists' lives.

Finally, racial trauma plays an important role in this novel, although I shall consider it to be integrated within the scope of intergenerational trauma for it addresses the internalized devaluation as a by-product of racism, the assaulted sense of self that affects the formation of identity during youth, and the internalized voicelessness that undermines the ability to defend oneself against negative messages regarding race (Hardy, K., 2013, 25-26). In his paper, Hardy provides important information for this study. He states that accumulated rage is also a result of experienced racism, making youth especially vigilant and violent. As such, negative self-esteem and oppressed rage are the natural consequences within groups that have experienced racial oppression in the past (Hardy, K., 2013, 25-26). Native Americans share in the same issues of violence and abuse as other racial minorities such as African Americans.

Finally, I must highlight that these three perspectives are the pillars that sustain my study. Additionally, I chose Louise Erdrich because, in my opinion, she is an author with a deep perception of psychological issues and consequences. Moreover, she is a Native American descendant herself who spent her childhood on a reservation. Being a member of the Anishinaabe tribe, she has experienced or seen in first person the issues which she tackles in her fiction. Her characters embody complex psychological states that show the darker parts of the human mind, even madness. I have studied other Native American authors such as Silko or Sherman Alexie, but I feel strongly that it is Louise Erdrich the author that best depicts the Native American community problems that have to be made visible.

### **3. Plot and structure within “Love Medicine”**

*Love Medicine*, which is the first novel published by Erdrich, presents the lives of three different generations in an Ojibwe reservation on the northern part of the United States. These three generations are, first, the ones who were sent to Indian Boarding Schools; second, their children; and, third, the grandchildren of these first “educated Indians”. The community is the novel’s true protagonist. Its characters tell their little stories until they draw a picture of how the dysfunctional community is and how it came to be.

The main plots that sustain the novel are June’s death and Nector’s, Lulu’s and Marie’s love triangle. They interconnect the different narratives within a common thread.



Other main characters that tell their own short stories are their children and grandchildren; Henry Junior, Lyman Lamartine, Gerry Nanapush, June Morrisey, Gordie Kashpaw, Albertine Johnson, Lipsha Morrisey and King Kashpaw. The narrative starts with June's death and jumps from character to character narrating different key events in their lives such as Lulu's and Nector's long time love, their affair, Marie's struggle as Nector's wife, Lyman and Henry Junior's suffering, Albertine's experiences, Gordie and June's bad marriage, and Lipsha's struggle to find who he really is. It is an extremely complicated novel to analyse due to the quantity of stories and characters. It is set across fifty years; from the 1930s till the 1980s. The reader sees the characters be born, mature, struggle and grow old. Each has their own troubles such as loss, identity crisis, poverty, domestic violence or posttraumatic stress disorder. Each individual plotline shall be explained as their characters are analysed in the paper.

Regarding structure, "Love Medicine" is not a linear story. There are many characters and multiple points of view. Each story or character conveys a theme and an issue which affects Native American communities. Time is irrelevant as well; stories from different times and generations are presented, using both flashbacks and the present. In fact, In Erdrich's book the present time is a direct consequence of the past, and suffering and wounds derive in almost unbelievable consequences in the lives of all the characters. The characters within *Love Medicine* are chained by the past and the loss of their culture, and until they confront it, they are not able to continue their lives in any positive way. In fact, many of them fail and they either die or are trapped in a destructive cycle of pain, self-destructive behaviour, existential void or madness.

#### **4. Native American issues within Erdrich's *Love Medicine***

##### **4.1. Indian Boarding Schools and the Stolen Generation**

In this section I shall analyse the so called "stolen generation" in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* which, together with some studies that I have selected, show the subtle ways in which Lulu's and Nector's experience in Boarding School creates two different dysfunctional families. Later, their very own children inherit their pain, which is added to poverty, racism and hopelessness. Marie's chapter, "Saint Marie", where she narrates her experience of abuse at the hands of a nun and her own obsession with becoming white, will be explained as well. Although she does not attend an Indian boarding school, her tale takes place in a Christian school near the reservation whose objective is the same: to forcefully assimilate Native American children into mainstream white society.

There is not better form of destroying a culture than to take away its children at a very young age. By taking these children far away from their parents, family structure is disrupted, and these children are not their parent's anymore. In the case of Native Americans, they became mostly strangers taught to despise their progenitors and their "uncivilized" lifestyle. Consequences have haunted Native communities long after these children were returned home. The results were unhealthy parenting strategies, inability to relate to one another after so much grief and loss during childhood, a shattered sense of self not belonging to white society nor Native, a lack of cultural symbols to help them cope with suffering, and traumas of physical and psychological abuse which many carried home. (Brown-Rice, K., 2013, 2-12) Although this was not what every Native American child experienced, and in fact school politics changed over the years for the better, it was the case for most.

Firstly, I shall explain the origin of Indian Boarding Schools. The idea was presented in Congress by Richard Pratt after a social experiment with Apache prisoners of war whom he "civilized". Afterwards, he founded the first Boarding School in Pennsylvania, 1870, under the motto "kill the Indian, save the man". Jones et. Al. (2011,) declare "by 1900, most American Indian children were taken from their families" (5). These children were sent to different schools built after Pratt's example. Therefore, most Native children from 1900 onwards spent their childhood learning the mainstream white society's way of life without seeing their families. Hence, when they returned home, Native American community members treated them as the White Indian Americans they had become, outcasting them. At the same time, these returned children were also rejected by white society. Jones et al. (2011, 5) claim: "No longer finding and identity in either the white or tribal society, thousands of American Indian adolescents were thrust into and abyss of lost identity".

In Erdrich's novel characters do not openly disclose this pain. Instead, Nector's, Lulu's and Marie's psychological wounds are showed not in their speech, but in their actions. Not conscious themselves of the consequences of forced assimilation and internalized trauma, they struggle to live a normal life while their pain drives them to dysfunctional behaviour such as alcohol abuse, cruelty, emotional unavailability, affairs, self-sabotaging behaviour, and cognitive dissonance.

In the first place, Nector's case is that of a man whose life has happened to him instead of having agency over his situation. First, he went to Hollywood, later he was a model for a famous painting and, then, it is hinted that he became a prostitute for men

and women in exchange of money. After realizing that white society only wanted him to play as the “dying Indian” in films and paintings, he decides to return to the reservation, his dreams of becoming a star crushed although he never says so. Once in the reservation, he falls in love with Lulu, who he knows since childhood, but, in a strange turn of events where he forces himself on a girl running down a hill, he marries another woman: Marie Lazarre. His life then becomes confusing for him. There are babies, work, alcohol and affairs. One day he wakes up from the confusion to find he is already middle aged and starts a five-year long affair with Lulu, an affair which ends when he lights the fire which burns Lulu’s house and her hair, leaving her bald forever.

The most outstanding characteristic within Nector’s narrations is that he never takes responsibility for his actions. He does not acknowledge his forcing on Marie as his doing, nor does he acknowledge that he had any intention of starting an affair with Lulu or burning her house after she tells him that she is going to marry another man. The most interesting thing is that, effectively, Nector is not lying, he is experiencing cognitive dissonance, which is a protection of one’s mind that lies to itself in order to prevent the person from noticing painful truths about himself or herself. To know to what extent Nector is responsible for what he does, we have to go to Lulu and Marie’s narration where he appears as the terrible man he is.

In Marie’s narration, we find a absent husband who is always drinking at the bar and ignoring his wife and children. In addition, he spends what he earns outside, and he disappears for several nights due to his affairs with other women. The only attention he gives Marie is to have sex with her and then leave, although later in the novel he slowly becomes a bit of a better man. This, however, does not prevent the children from growing in a household with an indifferent father, too many children, poverty and a mother who is the only one who provides for them. As a result, Nector and Marie’s children become more damaged individuals in the future than Lulu’s children.

On the other hand, in Lulu’s narration we meet a man who she loves and he loves her back, although he betrays and disappoints her as well. First, he marries another woman instead of her, secondly, he fails to protect her house as the tribal council president because of cowardice and then he starts the fire which consumes Lulu’s house and hair, almost killing Lyman, the child born as a result of their affair. He never speaks to Lulu again and, although he assures her that he never intended to burn Lulu’s house, Lulu narrates in her own story that she could see his intention of burning her house when she told him that she was marrying another man. Curiously enough, Nector never mentions

the fact that he knows that Lulu is going to marry another man in his story. His narrations are full of omissions and excuses for his doings.

The reality is that Nector, who was already selfish in nature, is raised in a boarding school far away from parents and their teachings. He is taught to be individualistic, a quality which in a community culture that is Native American is a characteristic which is frowned upon. With mainstream white society education, his selfishness becomes even greater. In addition, he is given too high expectations. Once he is out, he thinks that he will triumph in the white world, but he soon discovers that there is no acceptance for him there but for acting as the Indian who dies in Hollywood films or being a male prostitute. As it has been explained in previous pages, children who finished boarding schools found themselves to be neither Indians nor whites, and therefore suffered from a lack of identity. It is the case of Nector. People view him as a respectable leader and a good man, everyone but the women in his life who knew him well. In fact, this is the result of Marie's efforts. Nector is nothing but a hollow man with no clear identity that tries to fill his emptiness with an inflated ego, women and alcohol abuse. Moreover, he is trapped in what Rebecca Peterson calls the stolen generation cycle. She states that the parents who were raised in boarding schools, having never learnt to raise children by the example of their own parents, would be very insecure when raising their own, and it was common that stolen generation parents "would ignore their children and work instead" (Peterson, R., 2012, 7). Nector does this, leaving everything on Marie's shoulders and scaping from his family through alcohol, women and bets.

Lulu's case is not the same. She is rescued by her grandfather, Nanapush, and is brought back to the reservation at a young age. This, however, does not prevent her from experiencing the loss of her mother, Fleur, nor does it prevent the suffering she has to endure in the boarding school as she tries to flee many times in order to look for her absent mother. While Nector never talks about his experience in boarding school, Lulu's tale is different. Her first narration, "The Island", opens with her painful experiences of longing for her mother and forced confinement:

I wanted to fill her tracks, but luck run out the holes. My wishes were worn soles. I stumbled in those shoes of desire. Following my mother, I ran from the government school. Once, twice, too many times. I ran away so often that my dress was always the hot-orange shame dress and my furious scrubbing thinned sidewalks beneath my hands and knees to cracked slabs. [...] I missed the old language in my mother's mouth. (Erdrich, L., 2004, 68)

Lulu is also trapped in the stolen generation cycle. The family she forms, as well as Nector's, is a dysfunctional one. Both families experience the consequences of the psychological wounds that their parents suffer as a result of being torn apart from their families and community.

Even if she is raised in tradition by Nanapush, Lulu never recovers from her the loss of her mother. Then, later on, she losses Nector to another woman, the same Nector who was like an older brother to her in boarding school and used to buy her sweets and used to take her to films. It is when he comes back to the reservation that they fall in love, but after some kisses he marries another woman: Marie. Lulu is then left to her own resources and, somewhat broken, decides to go to her cousin Moses, who is a Pillager, like her mother. The Pillagers are a special family of shamans with strong spiritual powers in Lulu's community, and she herself seems to have them to some degree. Once there, he seduces him and becomes pregnant, but leaves him before the baby is born. Her later life becomes a confusing mess with different husbands and many affairs. She has eight children and, supposedly, they are all from different fathers. Her second husband, Harry, seems commit suicide on the train rails due to her constant infidelities. At his funeral, she has a sexual encounter with the brother of said deceased husband. Years later, she starts a long affair with Nector, who in the end burns her house and leaves her bald and in the street. She, however manages to survive with all her children. Nector and her reencounter during old age, although Nector is senile and does not remember many things.

Lulu's psychological wounds are deep and relevant. Her feelings of abandonment make her an emotionless woman that enjoys slaving men to her desires and inflicting pain upon them as an outcome to all her suffering and frustration. Although she, as Nector, never admits her pain in her chapters, being her voice one of the most cheerful and passionate ones, her actions betray her. As she states, she does many "crazy things" for which his children always forgive her, being these her many affairs with men on the reservation, married and single alike. Unable to handle her loss, she turns to risky

behaviour, and is unable to trust nor commit or stay faithful to one man: not her husband, not even Nector, who she loves deeply.

Her pain does not only affect her. As they grow, her children are called the crazy Lamartines. This is the result of having to cope with strange situations derived from Lulu's behaviour such as the suicide of their official father, Henry Lamartine. Although not much is explained about the marriage, people gossip about the reason for it. It seems to be Lulu's continuous unfaithfulness. Consequently, these children, though they love their mother intensely, grow up in a house where their parent's relationship is extremely toxic. Henry is said to have been madly in love with Lulu, enduring all her affairs, until, one day, he is unable to stand it anymore and drives drunk to the train rails at night where he is crushed.

Lulu's children are not left unscathed. They inherited their parent's pain and they show it in different forms as will be shown in the following pages.

Marie's situation is the most peculiar. Although she was not sent to a boarding school, she did attend a Christian school near the reservation where she met sister Leopolda. In her narrative we are shown a case of physical and psychological abuse at the hands of white mainstream educators and how it was allowed. The chapter titled "Saint Marie" is psychologically dark and disturbing. In it, Marie narrates her experiences in Leopolda's class as well as their later encounter when Marie tries to become a nun and flees in terror after being stabbed by sister Leopolda with a pinch. In Erdrich's later novel, *Tracks*, it is revealed that Leopolda is in truth Marie's mother and a Native American woman with so much self-loathing due to her race that she has become mad. The sad truth in this story is that Marie finally becomes what she feared the most and what Leopolda threatens her with: an Indian woman married to a drunk husband whose life consists on having more and more babies in complete poverty. Marie unintentionally falls into this life's trap as she encounters Nector while she flees the convent. Her life thereafter is miserable.

The first thing that stands out in her little story is that Marie herself is a victim of an internalized deification of whiteness and the demonization of non-white hues. She feels ignored by the white nuns and is adamant about becoming a saint to whom the all shall kneel. Her words are: "They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood" (Erdrich, L. 2004, 43). In other words, Marie feels superior to those of her race in the degree of her "whiteness", but for the white world she still is an Indian and she feels ignored. Marie

does not have any religious vocation; her intention has to do with being accepted among white society and to leave behind her Indian condition and her poor dysfunctional family, the Lazzares.

Her racial aversion comes from her upbringing, which can be seen in the scenes where she deals with sister Leopolda's lessons. Sister Leopolda uses a hook-pole to hit children on the head and that way drive the devil away, who she assures is very attracted to Indians as their traditions and language were made by him. In addition, Leopolda says that the devil has a special wanting for Marie herself. The girl believes her and starts to have visions where he stalks her. If they are true or not is never revealed. In the end, sister Leopolda hits Marie on a particular occasion and even locks her in a closet. Marie is terrified, imaging sister Leopolda's hook piercing her heart and truly believing that she is right and the devil is trying to enter her body and mind. As a result, Marie fears the devil all the time: "Before sleep sometimes he came and whispered conversation in the old language of the bush. I listened. He told me things he never told anyone except Indians" (Erdrich, L., 2004, 46). Then, taking advantage of her terror, Leopolda uses the justification of love and religion for her wrong-doings: physical abuse and psychological manipulation.

This is what happened in many instances in Indian school education: children were taught that their Native American blood made them less holy, even devilish, and that the only redemption was to forget the devil's language and practices, which was Native American heritage. Furthermore, they were also taught to despise themselves for their Native American features and blood. They would never be white, and whiteness was idealized perfection. All these created a complex of inferiority through these devaluating messages, throwing them into a nameless condition which today is known as racial oppression (Hardy, K., 2013).

At the end, Marie flees the convent where she tries to become a nun after her love-hate relationship with Leopolda goes too far. After Leopolda scalds Marie's hand with boiling water from a kettle as a punishment, Marie tries to throw Leopolda into the fire, and the nun, who success in thwarting her efforts, gets a fork, stabs her hand and, with a poke, knocks her out. When Marie wakes, she is being adored as a saint by the rest of the nuns in the convent that believe a lie that Leopolda has told them: that that injury appeared in her hand as a miracle, making Marie a holy girl. Nevertheless, she flees the convent after the incident.

*Saint Marie*, along with the *Island*, is one of the most fascinating narrations in the novel. It is the chapter where abuse and the demonization of Native American culture is seen in its clearest form. Between Nector, Lulu and herself, Marie gives the best example of how children were taught to fear and despise their origins and developed an unhealthy desire to be something which they would never become; whites. Consequently, they were left with nothing but negative comparative terms upon which to construct their identity. This is what internalized devaluation means, and it is linked to neglect, abuse and rejection (Hardy, K., 2013).

#### **4.2. The effect of Intergenerational Trauma and negative identity issues in the second generation**

The second generation in *Love Medicine* suffers the consequences of their parents' traumas as well as the result of Indian reservation policies that bring poverty and hopelessness to the community. These children endure hard conditions during their childhood. When they become adults, their lives are negatively influenced by the psychological wounds of all they had to endure plus their current situations.

It is June's death the event that opens the novel. On the first pages, we meet her while she is waiting for the bus in order to reunite with her family. She is a broken woman; June wears torn clothes which she hides under her jacket and has unprotected sex with strangers. She does so in the hope of meeting the right man that will rescue her from her pointless life. It is what she does in her story, but this time something breaks in her and she goes out into the snow and starts to "walk home". The first chapter and Albertine's opinions seem to imply that home is not the actual family house, but a peaceful somewhere that is achieved through death. "The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it and came home" (Erdrich, L., 2004, 7). Consequently, it is not wrong to assume that June's "home" means that she has reached a state of peace in the afterlife which she could never achieve in life. In the next paragraph we know that she is dead and her family, the Kashpaws, have already held the funeral.

In Albertine's narration, we learn that June left the reservation in search of a better life. She tried to establish a relationship with some white man to create a new home where she could take his son, King, with her, but her dream never came true. On the contrary, she ended having void sexual encounters with men that did not take her seriously. As Albertine states, back in those days, men considered Indian women just "easy nights", a fact which she affirms after having spent much time working with the truck drivers who June used to pursue. Both being Native American women who have had the experience



of being treated differently in white society because of their skin colour, Albertine understands the degree to which her aunt June has been broken piece by piece until she probably committed suicide in the snow for, when Albertine is driving back home, she says looking at the snow: “But June grew up on the plains. Even drunk she would have known a storm was coming” (Erdrich, L., 2004, 10). In fact, June was raised by Eli, the last remaining true Native American hunter raised in tradition. She knows how to move in the territory and what to do in such a case.

On top of that, it is later revealed that June tried to commit suicide when she was very young. She is first introduced as a child in Marie’s perspective. Marie’s mother brings the child to her house after finding her in the forest near her death mother. She had unexpectedly survived three days in the woods at the age of seven. Marie adopted her, but June preferred to go with Nector’s brother, Eli, and was raised in the old ways by him. Marie tells that June had a deep sorrow which could not be lifted in her dark eyes. She was hurt by what had happened in the wood with her mother. In fact, she refuses Marie’s love and care. Marie concludes that June could not trust a mother anymore, so she trusted only Eli as her father. She left Marie’s house and moved to Eli’ house in the woods. In the following years, she marries Marie’s oldest son, Gordie, and they have an unhappy marriage where he abuses her physically. June then starts to flee the family from time to time, returning when white society, mostly white men, reject her and she has no other place to go.

Nevertheless, June had a big secret that is one of the novel’s main plot: one of the many times she left her husband she had an affair with Lulu’s eldest son, Gerry, and she became pregnant. Their son is Lipsha, the teenager that Marie has adopted in her old age, never revealing to him that June is his actual mother. Consequently, Lipsha’s internal journey in the novel is to learn the truth and accept why his mother left him and the reason for his mistreatment in the Kashpaws family, mostly at the hands of King, June’s legitimate son.

June’s husband, Gordie, is the example of the alcoholic violent child result from dysfunctionality within the household and of the pressures of poverty and intergenerational trauma that plague the community. He is Marie’s firstborn, and he was raised during the worse years of the household when poverty, hunger and too many babies were the issues Marie had to contend alone. Later, he joined the army and, when he returned, he eloped with his cousin June. But Gordie soon became an alcoholic, he abused June physically and they lived in poverty.

The main problem with Gordie is that he is a violent alcoholic. On “Resurrection”, he rampages through Marie’s house, inspecting the kitchen in search of her saved money, throwing everything in his way. Without succeeding, he turns to his mother and Marie must defend herself using a knife, making a little bleeding cut on his son’s skin. On the other hand, Albertine reveals that Gordie has beaten June several times. When she was a child, June used to confide in her, and she learned that Gordie used to beat her often. Gordie seems to believe that he has indirectly killed June with his behaviour, and he is continuously imagining her ghost tormenting him. Whether this ghost is real or not within the novel, one cannot tell. Erdrich never reveals if supernatural happenings are just a fragment of her character’s imaginations or part of reality itself. The line between imagination and fact is always blurred, although Native American magic and beliefs are considered and proven real in many instances.

Unfortunately, Gordie represents one of the most common issues within Native American communities: alcohol dependence and major depression. Gordie has been raised with a father who was an alcoholic during his childhood and a mother that was always alone and depressed, yet she fought to earn money and raise her children. Gordie is the result of failed parenting strategies. Nector was a distant elusive parent who had a terrible conduct with his wife, and Marie was a fierce mother but was suffering too much emotional pain, abandonment and stress, things which she passes on to her children. Gordie reproduces the family dynamic with June: he is the alcoholic and abuses her, but June flees many times this dynamic until she freezes in the snow trying to go home once more time. Sarche and Spicy (2008) affirm that alcohol dependence and abuse, depression due to loss, poverty, failed parent strategies, and posttraumatic-stress disorder are the highest lifetime disorders in Native American population.

Alcohol abuse, dependence and violence are part of a cycle, and within *Love Medicine* the Kashpaws inherit it from one generation to another; it starts with Nector’s cruelty towards Marie and his nights out and drunk, it continues with Gordie and his domestic violence, and King continues the dynamic abusing his wife and traumatizing his son, King Junior, who at school has a completely different identity to escape the horror in his life; he makes everyone outside his family call him Howard.

Then is June’s lover case; Gerry Nanapush. He appears in only one chapter as a grown man. He is a life-long criminal, and due to his father being Moses Pillager, a descendant of a powerful shamanic Native American family, and it seems that his ability to escape prison has a magical explanation behind it. Nevertheless, he is one of the eight

Lamartine children, and Lulu is his mother. Gerry's tragedy is that he becomes a runaway that must flee to Canada, leaving his newfound wife and newly born son behind. Gerry represents one of the saddest truths in native American communities; many Native youths become criminals and spend their life in prison. Not even Lulu's education and love saves her children of the Native heritage of loss and the consequences of being raised in poverty and surrounded by violence and bad role models. Oddly enough, Gerry is regarded by the community as a kind of hero for being able to evade police officials so well, which shows the kind of disregard for safety and proper behaviour present in the community.

Alternatively, his brother, Henry Junior, meets an even worse fate. He appears in three chapters: "Lulu's Boys", "A Bridge", and "The Red Convertible". Henry Junior is revealed not to be Henry Lamartine's child, but his brother's, Beverly "Hat" Lamartine. After Lulu's husband, Henry Lamartine, commits suicide on the train rails, Lulu has a sexual encounter after the funeral with Beverly Lamartine. Nine months later, Lulu gives birth to a child: Henry Junior, named after Henry Lamartine, although his real father is Beverly Lamartine. Henry Junior is raised by Lulu along his eight brothers, being his closest brother Lyman, who is the result of Lulu and Nector's five-year long affair. Later, in "A Bridge", which is a story told through Albertine's point of view, Henry Junior appears in town as an US ex-marine who experiences posttraumatic stress disorder after being captured by the enemy in Vietnam in 1970. Albertine, who is a runaway teenager lost in town carrying her belongings in a plastic bag, sees Henry Junior and follows him. They finally spend the night in a hotel, but there Henry experiences nightmares and violent episodes due to the trauma as an ex-war prisoner, and Albertine, afraid, has to contend with a drunk semi-violent semi-emotional Native American ex-marine. That night, Albertine has her first sexual experience with him. In the next chapter, Henry Junior commits suicide. It is told through Lyman's point of view. After fixing the red convertible they both bought before Henry went to the marines, they both drive next to the river. There, Henry throws himself to the water and drowns. Lyman, who has seen everything, throws the red convertible into the water with his brother and goes home.

Henry's problem is not simply being a Native American. As many Native American young men, Henry Junior saw the army as both a scape from poverty and a means to enter the white world. His tale reminds experienced readers of Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* where, as Henry Junior, the narrative tells the struggle of a young ex-soldier who comes back to the reservation suffering of posttraumatic stress disorder. Contrary to Henry Junior, *Ceremony's* protagonist survives and heals due to his reconnection with

Native traditional healing ceremonies. Reese, Jack & White explain that corpus of stories and tradition within culture offer “different menus of images, themes, and plots for the construction of narrative identity” (2010, 237). Henry Junior, lacking these stories and culture full of role-models, themes and plots which would have helped him cope with his experiences and retell his live-story as that of a hero, finds live without meaning and decides to end it. In contrast, *Ceremony*’s protagonist, reconnecting with this menu of plots and role models, restructures his live narrative, redefines himself as a Native American warrior and is able to transcend the terrible and find new meaning in his life, ending the trauma through this redefinition.

Regrettably, Henry Junior’s situation was more common in the sixties and seventies than *Ceremony*’s. Henry’s tale represents the relevant issue within Native American communities of too many veterans suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder and acting in violent and self-destructive ways in which they do not only hurt themselves, but many around them: close family, children and even friends. Many chose suicide.

As an example, in the short story named “The Red Convertible”, Henry Junior is watching colour television when he bits his lips so hard that blood flows down his chin. Lyman, who is next to him, rises and goes to wake him from the strange state he has gotten into, but Henry Junior unconsciously smashes his brother against the wall. Lulu then enters and takes them to the dining-room for supper. While Henry eats, still trapped in his trance, the blood of his bitten lips falls on top of the bread “until he was eating his own blood mixed in with the food” (Erdrich, L, 2004, 187).

Back to the topic of youth suicide, it is nowadays a common issue within these communities. “Death due to suicide is 72% higher than that in the general populations”, state Sarche and Spicer (2008, June, 129), and they indicate that “American Indian and Alaska Native children are also exposed to repeated loss because of the extreme high rate of early, unexpected and traumatic deaths due to injuries, accidents, suicide, homicide, and firearms” (2008, June, 127). In fact, Henry Junior’s father committed suicide, and that is a wound that all Lulu’s children have to live with. Henry junior chose the same exit that the one who he thought his father taught him. As Sarche and Spicer indicate once more, due to interconnectedness in Native American communities, a traumatic loss has an effect on many people, and in the novel we see the result in Henry Junior, Lyman, the brother who loves him the most, and Albertine, the girl who is somewhat rescued by Henry in the streets and shares a sexual experience with him. Both tell a story about Henry Junior and both are changed after his loss.

On the other hand, Lyman, Lulu and Nector's child, is as complex as his father. Raised by Lulu and his brothers, he experiences rejection as a Native American, the struggle of poverty and the loss of his dearest brother, Henry Junior, who he also considers somewhat a father figure. Lyman, however, has a natural gift for business and for triumphing in life, although he is not as accomplished in his personal life. At the age of fifteen he starts working in a café, and, when he is just sixteen, he becomes the owner. The café, however, is lost in a tornado. Years later, his brother Henry Junior commits suicide next to him, throwing himself into the river. Lyman tries to find him: he throws himself after his brother, but he can never find him. As a result, Lyman throws after Henry Junior the red convertible that means so much to both. Later, as a gifted businessman, he is the one in charge of the Tomahawk factory that is built on the reservation, but the pro-Native American movement led by his mother Lulu and Marie destroys everything and Lyman finally converts it into a casino.

As people gossip, he resembles his father, Nector, very much; he has an easy life, but full of tragedy. Money comes easy to him. However, everything he loves is destroyed in the process. He loses closest brother, who is like a father to him, and he fails at keeping his Native American workers in the factory in place, even his own mother. The business is ruined because his loved ones have become enemies. He succeeds, but his personal life is a disaster. He is surrounded by too much pain and tragedy, and it takes its toll on him. Like Nector, being born Native traps him and makes him drown in their people's tragedy until he cannot escape the consequences of the pain of the past and the future. As it has been said, interconnectedness in Native American communities makes children and adults experience trauma through the tragedies of close people like family, friends and related family. There is no scape. Lyman himself affirms: "As I walked back from the river that filled my brother's boots, I could feel change coming onto me, riding me hard. [...] I saw my talent for money was useless with the deeper problems. Worse than useless. Is I bobbed to the surface, others went down" (Erdrich, L., 2004, 298).

After Henry Junior dies, Lyman falls into a depression and resorts to alcohol. All his business fail, and credit notices pile up in his house while he is drunk. He says: "I had lost my brother, who was a father to me too" (Erdrich, 2004, 299). And, in a following paragraph, he shows to what extent Native American tradition has been torn off from this second generation: "The government knew me though the wind and the earth did not. I was alive, at least on paper. I owned cash" (Erdrich, 2004, 301). Like Nector, Lyman has learned to focus on money and government and has no connection to the old religion

or its teachings. This phrase means that the wind and the earth, powerful brother-like figures for Native Americans, do not know him, therefore his own ancestry and tradition does not know him and as a result he is only Indian in name and the colour of his skin. As Henry Junior, he has no access to the menu of images and plots of Native American culture and, therefore, he cannot access it to lay a strong foundation for his identity and his sense of self. The only foundation that he can use is owning money, fact that he has already stated that is “useless” because his loved ones “go down” when he is successful. Depending on money for a sense of self, which is a common feature even in today’s capitalistic world, makes him selfish, lonely and sad. He has money, but not human connection. He is the antithesis of the traditional Indian, born from connection with the tribe and the natural world. He is born from “government”: “Out of a typo, I was formed, out of papers, I came to be” (Erdrich, 2004, 301). He starts working for the BIA, The Bureau of Indian Affairs, and, just like Nector, becomes the enemy of his own people. He is the Native that is thirsty for money and power, and therefore destroys peoples’ lives and hopes through paperwork and even learns how to send Native business and declarations to other offices or Washington for them to be ignored indefinitely. He raises in the ranks, helping the corrupted system until he is at the peak of said system. Meanwhile, his mother Lulu becomes, along Marie, a leader of the traditional Native American movement.

Curiously enough, Lyman, somewhat helps his mother by becoming Nector after his death. In a visit that his mother pays to his new house, Lyman understands that by becoming like Nector he is helping Lulu. He is giving her the opportunity to contend with a rival and to control a man alive. Lyman, apparently selfish, when he is old enough, comprehends his mother’s wounds and helps her to draw her strength from that dark part of her psyche, that need to feel powerful and secure by controlling others, mostly men. And he plays his part for her. He does everything as he thinks Nector would have done.

Comprehensively, Lyman is hurt by never being recognized by Nector. At the end of the destruction of the tomahawk factory, he finally speaks with Marie and their conversation leads him to understand that his father did speak of him, talk about him and that he would have been proud for what he had attempted on the reservation filling his tracks. In addition, he reconnects to tradition understanding what, as a traditional, Marie is trying to tell him: “She was going to tell me that change came about in slow measure and although my pain was bitter, it was not unnatural and therefore I could absorb it the way earth drinks in rain. [...] Marie Kashpaw was going to say that I was of the outer and

the inner... I could come back, make my way down the narrow roads. She was going to tell me that I had a place” (Erdrich, 2004, 324). The chapter starts with Lyman saying he is made by money and paper, but he encounters connection and tradition, and, unlike his brother Henry Junior, he is healed of the pain by reconnecting with Native American culture and he is able to establish a grounded identity to live, which is what he means with the words “to have a place”. These words mean that he now knows that he belongs somewhere. He is not alone, nor does he come from nothing: he comes from a long heritage of Chippewa people whose culture had been stolen. He knows how he came to be; through his people, not through paper or the government’s lists. He therefore becomes a proud Chippewa warrior with a strong healthy identity.

On next chapter, “Lyman’s Luck”, Lyman shows that he is overcoming intergenerational trauma when he accepts what has happened in the past in the following paragraph: “They gave you worthless land to start with and then they chopped it out from under your feet. They took your kids away and stuffed the English language in their mouth. They sent your brother to hell, they shipped him back fried. They sold you booze for furs and then told you not to drink” (Erdrich, 2004, 326). Moreover, after accepting the history of injustice and violence, Lyman develops a new sense of hope and plans his final business: a casino that will revitalize the community with money. The casino has also a special meaning for Native American culture; contrary to Christianity, cunning and deceit are not sinful things. They are qualities admired in Native American tradition through the figure of the trickster, and the casino is the native American way to trick the government. It tricks white society to return them the money that they stole. That is Lyman’s solution; the trickster way “...to take money from retired white people who had farmed Indian hunting grounds, worked Indian jobs, lived high while their neighbours lived low, looked down or never noticed who was starving, who was lost” (Erdrich, 2004, 327).

The second generation, as it has been showed, must contend with the consequences of intergenerational trauma and their own psychological wounds after the incidents they experience in their lives. Those who are able heal through reconnection with the past and tradition: those who are not are drown in despair or either they meet death.

#### **4.3. The third generation and the final consequences of the Intergenerational Trauma cycle and its effect on their identity formation**

The third generation is the one closest to our times; their stories take place in the eighties. They are the result of a traumatized second generation that has suffered the loss of culture, the poverty within the reservation and the issues which their parents have suffered as a result of the failed parenting strategies of the stolen generation. It is also the time of the pro-traditional Indian movement. In *Love Medicine* these children are three; Albertine Johnson, part of the Kashpaws, Lipsha Morrissey, June and Gerry's secret son, and King, Gordie and June's legitimate son.

Albertine Johnson is an example of how intergenerational dysfunctional parenting strategies are perpetuated through generations. She is Marie's granddaughter, being Zelda her mother. Her relationship with Zelda is complicated. Zelda, as Marie, wanted to become a nun, but, after having Albertine, she was forced to work in order to raise her and had to live in a trailer stationed next to her mother's house for years. As a result of her bad relationship with her mother, Albertine became a runaway at a very young age. In one of those episodes, she met Henry Junior and had her first sexual relationship with him in a strange situation. Later, she discovered he had committed suicide. She also meets Gerry, his girlfriend and their new-born son while she works in a truck company. After some time, she decides to improve her life and starts to study nursing in a distant university.

Albertine, as most of the Native Americans of the new generation, cannot help but feel hurt by the treaties and policy acts that have stolen their land and the fact that so many white settlers occupy territories which rightfully belong to them. This is worsened by the fact that these children have grown in poverty as it is the case with Albertine, having to be raised in a trailer. In her narrative, she looks around in her car and says: "The policy of allotment was a joke. As I was driving towards the land, looking around, I saw as usual how much of the reservation was sold to whites and lost forever" (Erdrich, L., 2004, 12). The issue of stolen land is not something of the past: it continues today, and young Native people are hurt by their powerlessness to do anything.

King and Lipsha's situation is also difficult. Although Lipsha knows nothing until the middle of the novel, they are half-brothers, and their mother is the recently deceased June.

Born in a family where there was violence and a mother that came and went away constantly, King recreates the same dynamic of domestic abuse with his wife Lynette and



his son King Junior. At the same time, in order to cope with feelings of abandonment caused by his mother and the fact that he is a Native American, King is a violent man and, like his parents, a drunk. He drinks too much alcohol, explodes in outbursts of violence and abuses his wife physically. It happens in chapter one, "The World's greater fisherman". There, it is also revealed that he feels a deep admiration for his uncle Eli, the man that raised June and the last Native American on the reservation who has been raised in the old tradition. Here, King reveals to what extent he is wounded by the fact that, after Eli's death, there would be no one who knows the old ways in their community. When his wife comments on this, King explodes, attacking her verbally. Then he goes out and ends up crying on the floor remembering his death mother, June, a Native American woman that alcohol, suffering, poverty and white men have destroyed little by little until she dies pitifully on her way home.

At the end of the chapter, King is drowning his wife in the sink. He is completely drunk. Albertine must jump over his back and bite his ear for him to react and release her.

Lipsha Morrissey is the most interesting young character in the novel. Being descendant of the Pillager family, which is known for their dark magical powers and customs, Lipsha is born a shaman. His life is not easy. He was adopted by a very old Marie and, instead of revealing to him that his mother is June, she lies and tells Lipsha that his true mother left him to drown and she took pity and took him home. At the start of the novel, Lipsha hates the mother that has abandoned him while the whole family and community know his secret; that June is his real mother. King, his half-brother, abuses him physically during their childhood for this fact, although Lipsha ignores that his rage is caused by King's own feelings of abandonment and pain for June's betrayal to the family. It is Lulu the one who reveals Lipsha his true heritage, recognizing in him the inherited magical talent of the Pillager bloodline.

The teenager is a quiet and shy and suffers from a very negative identity. He believes himself abandoned by his real parents, and, in the Kashpaw family, he suffers abuse at the hands of king and the quiet rage of Marie, with whom he has a difficult love-hate relationship. His identity changes when his real parents are revealed to him and he is then able to search for his father, Gerry, and spend a little time with him before he flees.

## 8. Conclusion

The lives of *Love Medicine*'s characters are full of tragedy. It is a tragedy either caused by their own deeds or inherited from the mistakes of their parents and close relationships. The reader is shocked by the character's tendency towards self-destruction.

In chapter one, Albertine tries to fix the pies that have been smashed by the fight between King and Lynette, his wife. The pies are a metaphor that closes the chapter in the following pages and opens the theme of the novel; as Albertine states, Native American people "once they smash there is no way to put them right" (Erdrich, L., 2004, 42). The rest of the novel is a compilation of intimate stories that show in what ways they have been smashed like those pies and what are the consequences in their lives: violence, depression, suicide, alcohol, no safe sexual encounters, lust and unfaithfulness, emotional disconnection, traumatized children that repeat their mistakes and treason.

What holds the narratives together is one question: why are these people so confused and self-destructive? The answer is that they endure a deep pain which comes from the past: the loss of culture, and therefore identity, and a past of violence and mass murder against their communities. Native Americans experience unspoken grief for what has happened to their ancestors, to their grandparents, their parents, themselves and what still happens to their very children. This cycle plagues nowadays Native American communities, and it is called intergenerational trauma. Along with racial trauma and a negative identity based on the loss and suffering of the past, Native American communities struggle. *Love Medicine* is a deep analysis of such problems.

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